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California Volunteers Announces Inaugural Governor and First Lady's Medals for Service Recipients

Awards Recognize Outstanding Volunteer, Nonprofit Leader and Business Volunteer Program of 2009

San Francisco – California held its inaugural Governor and First Lady's Medals for Service ceremony at the Intercontinental Hotel on Monday, June 22, handing out three prestigious awards honoring the state's top volunteer leaders. Attended by First Lady Maria Shriver and California Secretary of Service and Volunteering Karen Baker, the recipients received their honors as part of the 2009 National Conference on Volunteering and Service, taking place in San Francisco from June 22-24.

The California Medals for Service, an important component to the California Volunteers volunteer recognition program, were introduced to distinguish individual volunteers, business volunteer programs and nonprofit leaders whose innovation in the field of volunteerism has had a tangible impact on their community, region and the state of California. Shining a spotlight on the state's commitment to service, the awards demonstrate how simple acts can make big changes in communities across California.

"We received more than 100 nominations for the 2009 inaugural awards filled with amazing stories about volunteers and service projects that are changing neighborhoods and lives throughout the state," said California's Secretary of Service and Volunteering Karen Baker. "Today's recipients rose to the top of the outstanding nominations as the embodiment of the service movement. They are an inspiration to us all on what can be achieved through determination and commitment."

Volunteer of the Year

Thomas Zimmerman, Co-Founder Extreme Science Program

Thomas Zimmerman, a scientist at IBM Almaden Research Center in San Jose, has been bringing his hands-on approach to volunteerism to local schools for more than seven years, with specific focus on low-income, non-native English speaking students. Zimmerman founded and directs the Extreme Science Program at the Latino College Preparatory Academy (LCPA) in East San Jose, a hands-on after-school science enrichment program to encourage young people to pursue careers in science and engineering. The program has grown to 16 teachers, attracting scientists and engineers from NASA Ames, Lockheed Martin, San Jose State University and the United States Geological Survey. He is now expanding his volunteer work to the college level at the San Jose State University Department of Mechanical and Aeronautical Engineering, supporting minority students on solar energy projects and providing mentors for his high school students.

Nonprofit Leader of the Year

David Levinson, Founder and Director, Big Sunday

Hailing from Los Angeles, David Levinson, founder and executive director of Big Sunday, was recognized as California's Nonprofit Leader of the Year. Founded in 1999, Big Sunday is a 50,000 volunteer two-day event across Southern California, serving more than 300 nonprofit organizations, engaging people across faith, ethnic, economic, cultural and other boundaries. Big Sunday volunteers paint, build, repair, plant, play, cook, sew, organize, entertain, sell lemonade, decorate cookies, make greeting cards and deliver food in the spirit that everyone has some way they can help somebody else. Through Levinson's leadership, the event has grown to be the largest regional community service event in the country.

Business Volunteer Program of the Year

Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E)

PG&E received the service award for California's Business Volunteer Program of the Year for their support of the California State Park Foundation's Earth Day Restoration and Cleanup program. Over the past eight years, more than 5,000 of PG&E's dedicated employee volunteers have been involved in a variety of activities, including the building of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) pathways; installation of interpretive signs; planting of trees and community gardens; the removal of tons of trash and recyclables; and other improvements such as painting over graffiti and installing irrigation systems. This work helped mitigate the significant maintenance backlog faced by California's parks. In partnership with a variety of nonprofits throughout California, PG&E has also been involved with more than 500 employee volunteer events this past year.

Led by Baker, the nation's first cabinet secretary of service and volunteering, CaliforniaVolunteers is the state office that manages programs and initiatives to increase the number of Californians involved with service and volunteering, including the state AmeriCorps program, California Citizen Corps and the Cesar Chavez Day of Service and Learning. First Lady Maria Shriver serves as honorary chairperson.

In an effort to recognize as many volunteers as possible throughout the state, CaliforniaVolunteers also awards Governor and First Lady's Service Awards to Californians who submit the required number of service hours to approved certifying organizations. For more information on CaliforniaVolunteers and its volunteer recognition programs, visit www.CaliforniaVolunteers.org.

The Governor and First Lady's Medals for Service luncheon and awards were made possible by a grant from the Shinnyo-en Foundation.

CaliforniaVolunteers

CaliforniaVolunteers is the state office that manages programs and initiatives to increase the number of Californians involved with service and volunteering, including the state AmeriCorps program, California Citizen Corps and the Cesar Chavez Day of Service and Learning. Through the innovative Web site, CaliforniaVolunteers.org, individuals and families can find more than 45,000 volunteer opportunities throughout the state involving the arts, education, animals, disaster preparedness, the environment and other areas of interest. Karen Baker, the nation's first state cabinet secretary of service and volunteering leads the organization and First Lady Maria Shriver serves as the honorary chairperson. For more information, please visit www.CaliforniaVolunteers.org.